

URBANIZATION, ETHNICITY AND POLITICS IN TROPICAL AFRICA:  
PROBLEMS OF NATIONAL INTEGRATION AND POLITICAL  
STABILITY (A CASE STUDY OF THE FEDERAL  
REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA)

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ABSTRACT

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Urbanization, Ethnicity and Politics in Tropical Africa: Problems of  
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The problems of nation-building are anything but new in Africa. The new cities of Africa have the same influence in nation-building as cities have had in other parts of the world, but some of these nations which have been born under less fortunate conditions will find the achievement of nationalism and ethnic integration a very difficult task as is the case in Nigeria.

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, and achieved her independence in 1960 from British colonial rule. Geographically, socially and culturally it is a multi-national society. Its colonial history, its present problems and its future prospects and potentialities are in many respects typical of those of other African countries. However, Nigeria has in many other respects been distinguished by certain characteristic features which set it apart from other countries and make it of special interest and appeal. Among these was the peculiar set-up by Britain of the three regional governments with total control of these regions by each of the three main ethnic groups.

Unfortunately, Britain did little to reconcile these varied political cultures in order to create an integrated Nigerian nation. The Richards Constitution of 1946 attempted to promote Nigerian unity, but it did not provide adequate political representation for the whole country. Furthermore, the impact of westernization was not felt equally by all tribal groups. Nigerian leaders inherited this state of affairs from the British, and their inability to cope effectively with the seemingly overwhelming problems permitted the continued expression of regional and ethnic hostilities.

In a short generation, 1900-1960, the quality of social and the style of political life in Nigeria assumed many different characteristics. Those years spanned the country's first surge of urban growth, the centralization and expansion of bureaucratic activities under colonial rule and a concurrent attempt at widening the bases of administration and political recruitment.

This new transformation came in the wake of the British presence and the contact of the natives with European merchants and missionaries. But the important thing is that this transformation did not proceed everywhere at the same speed and its intensity varied from sector to sector, region to region, within the society. This unevenness in the developmental process led to an ardent struggle for power over the distribution or redistribution of scarce resources among the emergent contenders who were laying exclusive claims on the operation of the government. Thus, the period was not only a time of great political and social development, but also a time of profound political conflict, regionalism and tribalism.

The main task of this case study then centers on the analysis of a

set of structural changes and how these changes in turn generated the social climate that was conducive to political protests and developments in Nigeria during the period 1900-1970. In discussing this topic, anthropology, history, political science and sociology have equal relevance. Thus, in this study the writer has attempted to place the great struggles for power in the context of the whole range of historical facts with greater attention to the unevenness of change in the society and the divisions, and cleavages among and within the regions and ethnic groups. In the treatment of the subject, the following points are discussed:

1. Traditional urbanization in Africa.
2. Urbanization of ethnic groups in Nigeria.
3. Treatment of various ethnic groups by colonial administrators.
4. Early protests and political organization.
5. Intensification of the politics of tribalism in order to control the center.
6. Failure of the first Republic to integrate and possible suggestions for the future.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The important role of cities in nation-building has generally been recognized. According to Spengler, "nations are the true city-building peoples. In the strongholds they arose, with the cities they ripen to the full height of their world-consciousness, and in the world-cities they dissolve."<sup>1</sup> In his book, Mumford points out that the Roman Empire was "the product of a single expanding urban power-center" and was itself "a vast city-building enterprise."<sup>2</sup>

In Africa, cities have played a similar role in nation building and empires as in other parts of the world.<sup>3</sup> The kingdoms of Old Sudan--Ghana, Mali and Songhay, were all the result of expanding urban power centers which, because of their superior iron technology, were able to control the flow of gold to the Mediterranean. Despite the distortions of the history of Africa by Europeans, the early Portuguese explorers reported that they found Benin, the capital of the city-state of the same name, prosperous, peaceful and orderly and devoted to the working of metals and woods.<sup>4</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> Oswald Spengler, The Decline of the West (New York, 1939), p. 171.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis Mumford, The City in History (New York, 1961), p. 205.

<sup>3</sup> See Basil Davidson, The Lost Cities of Africa (Boston, 1959).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 134ff.

ruins of Zimbabwe are the mute evidence of a vast tribal-feudal kingdom in Southern Africa.

There can be no question concerning the existence of cities and their importance in Africa before the coming of the Europeans.<sup>1</sup> However, this study focuses on the role of the new cities of Africa, which are mainly the product of modern industrialization in Africa. These new cities are different from the cities which existed before the coming of the Europeans. The preindustrial African city was a market place and the seat of feudal power, and often the center of a religious cult. It lacked the dynamism of the modern industrial city, a fact which is of primary importance in considering urbanization in relation to social and political changes in Africa.

The new African cities, like the cities of the Western World, are characterized by their heterogeneous population. By heterogeneous populations we mean that people of different racial and cultural backgrounds are drawn into the cities. In the case of African cities it is not so much a question of different races but of peoples drawn from different tribal or cultural backgrounds. In his survey of Sekondi-Takoradi, Busia states that 62 tribal divisions, including Europeans and other foreigners as one tribal division, were represented in that city in 1951.<sup>2</sup>

Other cities of Africa, more especially the new cities, exhibit a similar ethnic and tribal heterogeneity. In the traditional cities

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<sup>1</sup>Williams Bascom, "Urbanization Among the Yoruba," The American Journal of Sociology 60 (March 1955): 446-454.

<sup>2</sup>K. A. Busia, Report on a Social Survey of Sekondi-Takoradi (London, 1951), p. 3.



the section settled by the newer ethnic and tribal elements are sometimes marked off by the older sections inhabited by lineage or kinship groups.<sup>1</sup> The increasing heterogeneity of urban centers is very important in nation building because only as Africans escape from their lineage or kinship attachments and become free of tribal particularisms can they develop a national consciousness. For example, as long as an African thinks of himself as a Yoruba or an Ibo or a Hausa and maintains his loyalty to one or the other of these people, it will be impossible for a Nigerian nation to develop. As Coleman has pointed out, it is the stranger sectors of the cities of Nigeria that have become centers of nationalist activity, while the attachment of Africans to lineage groups in the tradition-bound older centers of the cities has been an obstacle to the emergence of a nationalist outlook during and after colonial rule.<sup>2</sup>

The purpose in this study is to consider the manner in which the political processes involved in urbanization affected the problems of national integration and political stability in Nigeria. That is, in effect, the present study is focused upon the social and historical background of the emergence of nationalism in Nigeria. In spite of its great significance in the modern world, nationalism has received relatively little attention on the part of American sociologists. Neither the students of political sociology, nor those of social movements, have shown much interest in the subject, leaving it to be explored by other disciplines--history, political science, and more recently anthropology.

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<sup>1</sup>J. S. Coleman, Nigeria: Background to Nationalism (Berkeley, 1958), pp. 78-79.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

Nigeria is one of the largest of the independent countries in Africa. It is also the most heavily populated of all political units in Africa and the twelfth most populous country in the world. It contains within its borders the three largest nationalities in Africa--each numbering more than nine million people as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1  
NIGERIA'S MAJOR ETHNIC GROUPS

Ethnic Group	Total Populations
Hausa	11,652,745
Yoruba	11,320,509
Ibo	9,246,388
Fulani	4,784,366
Kanuri	2,259,091
Ibibio	2,006,489
Tiv	1,393,649
Ijaw	1,088,885
Edo	954,770
Other Nigerians	10,851,071
Total	55,558,163

Source: Nigerian Census, Lagos, 1963.

Moreover, the groups that make up its population reflect the widest range of political organization of any territory on the continent. It is the only political entity in Africa where most of the main African Language groups are found. In short, in terms of size, wealth and diversity,

Nigeria has much to distinguish it from other areas.

The analysis will primarily cover the period from 1900 to 1975. Nineteen hundred was the date when "Nigeria" emerged as a political unit known to the world and the peoples living within its boundaries, and 1975 marks that point in time when the new nation settled down with social and political problems by creating nineteen states in the country, thereby giving all ethnic groups a say in the government.

The discussion to follow is divided into five chapters. Chapter II describes the historical trends in urbanization of different groups. Chapter III is the analysis of early political activity. Chapter IV contains a general survey of the growth and institutionalization of ethnic sectionalism or regionalism in politics, through the constitutional conferences hosted by the colonial government. Chapter V describes the tribal or ethnic competition for dominance before independence which leads to tribal or regional conflicts after independence and eventually results in secession and civil war from 1967 to 1970. Then, Chapter VI is the summary and conclusion.

## CHAPTER II

### URBANIZATION AND ETHNICITY

#### Historical Trends in Urbanization of Different Groups

Since the establishment of British administration in Nigeria, western economic forces have profoundly changed both the structure of traditional Nigerian societies and the perspectives of Nigerian peoples. The tempo and character of changes created situations and attitudes that have pre-disposed many Nigerians to racial consciousness and nationalist activity.

With political stability and internal security assured by the British presence, the new economic forces gave rise to new urban centers and accelerated the growth of most traditional centers. Since the major employing agencies (government and commercial firms) had their headquarters in cities, the majority of Nigerians drawn into salaried and wage employment became urban dwellers. As entrepôts in the expanding market economy, cities became centers of activity for the new urban class of traders and merchants. Most of the secondary schools were located in or near the larger cities (for example, Lagos, Ibadan, Onitsha, Calabar and Zaria), which meant that each upcoming generation of school boys in training for clerkdom were inured to and seduced by city life before they secured their first jobs. The cities became not only melting pots, but the breeding and training grounds, as well as the arenas of Nigerian nationalism.

A direct consequence of urban life has been the intensification of

the division of labor. As urban Nigerians became increasingly dependent upon their occupational specialities or salaried jobs, they lost the economic and psychological security of the lineage and the self-sufficient rural community. Their physical removal from customary sanctions, traditional authorities, and parental surveillance alone gave them a sense of personal freedom and anxiety not previously experienced. Furthermore, the impersonality, heterogeneity, and competitiveness of urban life accentuated their personal insecurity as well as their individualism. The latter became more pronounced as a result of the quest not only for survival but also for status and prestige within the urban social structure.

The city was also a center for intensive acculturation.<sup>1</sup> There Nigerians not only came into daily and intimate contact with Europeans and with educated and sophisticated Africans, but also saw varieties of European-made gadgets and goods on conspicuous display. The acculturating influence of the city was in turn carried to rural homelands through kinship associations and tribal unions or by the vivid oral reports of returning migrants. Urban dwellers became acutely aware of the wide gap between the higher standards of living and greater amenities of the city—especially in the European quarters—and the poverty of their rural villages. They therefore consciously endeavored to take the enlightenment, modernity, and "civilization" of the urban centers to the villages. Tribal unions were

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<sup>1</sup>The acculturation role of the city in Nigeria has been not unlike that of the city in Yucatan, where urban influence extended into the hinterland to the town, the peasant village, and the tribal village. Cited by W. Schwartz, Nigeria (New York, 1968), p. 18.

the main agents in this process of early diffusion, just as they were later in spreading to the rural areas the political consciousness and nationalist ideas born in the urban centers.

These general consequences of urbanization must, however, be somewhat qualified. The developments noted were, at best, only broad tendencies, with wide variations in their occurrence.<sup>1</sup> The tribal variations in urban development prior to the Western impact are significant in an evaluation of the economic, social and political consequences of that impact. The data in Table 2 reveal that the Yorubas in the Western State are the most highly urbanized people in Nigeria, yet during the period 1921-1952 they had the lowest rate of urban growth, and the population of their cities were the least heterogeneous in all Nigeria, and part from Lagos, their cities have been least affected by the urbanization resulting from the Western intrusion.

The pattern of urban development in the Eastern states and particularly among the Ibo peoples of the East-Central state, sharply contrasts with the Yoruba pattern. There were no pre-existent cities. As late as 1931 there were no cities with a population of more than 20,000 throughout that vast and heavily populated area. By 1952, however, there were four cities, each with a population of more than 50,000, of which 85 per cent

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<sup>1</sup>The consequences in Nigeria were but approximations of the general characteristics of "urbanism" as described by Louis Wirth in "Urban Sociology and Civilization" American Journal of Sociology 45 (March 1940): 752; and "Urbanism as a Way of Life," American Journal of Sociology 45 (March 1938): 1-8.

TABLE 2

PROPORTION OF EACH STATE LIVING IN URBAN CENTERS WITH  
POPULATION OF 20,000 OR MORE PEOPLE, 1963

State	Ethnic Majority	Total Population 1963	Number Urban	Percent Urban Population/ State Population
North-Western	Hausa	5,733,295	481,648	8.4
North Central	Hausa	4,098,306	505,602	12.3
Kano	Hausa	5,774,840	343,685	6.0
North-Eastern	Kanuri	7,793,444	839,968	10.8
Benue-Plateau	Tiv	4,009,407	378,013	9.4
Kwara	Nupe	2,399,366	473,397	19.7
South-East	Ibibio/Efik	3,622,592	249,393	6.9
East-Central	Ibo	7,227,559	853,426	11.8
Rivers	Ijaw	1,544,313	249,056	16.1
Mid-West	Edo	2,535,839	283,778	11.2
West	Yoruba	9,487,526	4,923,410	51.9
Lagos	Yoruba	1,443,568	1,047,231	72.5
Nigeria		55,670,005	10,628,607	19.1

Source: Lecture for the Orientation Course for Youth Service Corps; Table VI, p. 18.

was Ibo. The rate of growth of these eastern urban centers during the three decades from 1921-1952 (688 per cent)<sup>1</sup> was far higher than elsewhere

<sup>1</sup>James S. Coleman, Background to Nationalism (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1958), p. 77.

in Nigeria. Yet, this rapid and intensive urbanization of the Ibo peoples since the British occupation of the whole of Nigeria is a phenomenon not only of the Eastern states, their homeland. Ibos also constitute more than one-third of the non-indigenous population of the urban centers in the Northern and Western states. As the figures in Table 3 reveal, the proportion is much higher for non-Ibo cities. These figures are important not only as evidence of the intensive, rapid, and widespread urbanization of the Ibo peoples, but also as a partial insight into their vanguard role in the nationalist movement.

TABLE 3  
DEGREE OF IBO URBANIZATION OUTSIDE  
IBOLAND EARLY 1950's

City	Indigenous Group	Percent of Ibo in Non-Indigenous Population
Lagos	Yoruba	44.8
Benin City	Edo	53.5
Sapele	Urhobo	48.0
Calabar	Efik/Ibibio	50.7
Kano	Hausa	38.0
Zaria	Hausa	39.0
Kaduna	Mixed	40.7

Source: Population Census of the Western Region of Nigeria, 1952 (Lagos: Government Statistician, 1953-1954); Population Census of the Eastern Region of Nigeria, 1953 (Lagos: Government Statistician, 1953-1954); Population Census of Northern Region of Nigeria, 1952 (Lagos: Government Statistician, 1952-1953).



In the Hausa-Fulani urbanization, the tribal homogeneity of indigenous peoples was to a large extent preserved. It was in the stranger section on the periphery of the traditional city that one found heterogeneity, a weakening of lineage ties, and evidence of the instability, insecurity, and atomism frequently attributed to modern urban life.<sup>1</sup> The compartmentalization of urban life in Western and Northern cities has, however, inhibited political integration and the development of a cosmopolitan or "nationalist" outlook. The stranger sectors have been the centers of nationalist activity, partly because of the higher education and tribal composition of the population and the greater impact of a cosmopolitan urban life, but also because of grievances and frustrations felt by the strangers at being treated as outcasts and subjects of the traditional city heads, who, of course, were supported by British authority.<sup>1</sup>

These different patterns of urbanization in Nigeria are relevant to a study of the roots of nationalism in that we can give qualified acceptance to the proposition that urbanization leads to social disintegration and a greater susceptibility to nationalism and political activity. In its early stages political activity in Nigeria was a wholly urban phenomenon as expressed in traditional or tribal unions.

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<sup>1</sup> In the Northern Region both ruling Emirs and the British authorities had good political reasons for maintaining the separation between the traditional sector and the stranger sector. It was a logical corollary of indirect rule, but it has also served to shield the peoples of the indigenous sector from unsettling political ideas and from active contact with the more nationalist-minded Southerners living in the Sabon garis. In the Yoruba cities of the West, the separation was partly economic in character.

### Ethnic Unions in Urban Centers

From the late 1920's on, kinship and tribal unions sprang up in the main urban centers of Nigeria. These associations were known by various names: for example, Calabar Improvement League, Naze Family Meeting, Ngwa Clan Union, Owerri Divisional Union, Igbirra Progressive Union and Urhobo Renascent Convention. These unions gave organizational expression to the persistent feeling of loyalty and obligation to the kinship group and the town or village where the lineage was localized.

During the forty-year period 1911-1951, the number of Ibos in Lagos increased from 264 to 26,000.<sup>1</sup> In the Northern States there were less than 3,000 Ibos in 1921, and nearly 12,000 by 1931, and by 1951 the number had increased to more than 120,000. These figures become more meaningful when it is realized that most of the Ibo immigrants gravitated to the urban centers where wage employment could be obtained. The influx of Ibos into the towns of the West and North, and their rapid educational development which made them competitors for jobs and professional positions were two indicators of their emergence as an active group in Nigerian affairs. Another factor of indeterminate significance in the Ibo awakening was a certain characteristic personality and the behavioral traits attributed to the group. Some observers have sought to relate such traits to distinctive patterns of Ibo culture. Green points out that is the "go-getter" who is admired "the man who has wives and children and bestirs himself and makes money. . . . A man who just sits quiet is not respected."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>P. Amaury Talbot, The Peoples of Southern Nigeria (Oxford, 1962), Vol. IV; Population Census of the Western Region of Nigeria, 1952, Bulletin No. 5 (Lagos, 1953).

<sup>2</sup>M. B. Green, Ibo Village Affairs (London, 1947), p. 255.

The Ibo attitude toward authority and Ibo individualism in political affairs were partly the outgrowth of the conciliar and "democratic" character of Ibo political processes. Moreover, the Ibo political system gave latitude to youth. An enterprising, talented young man who acquired wealth could attain political power, even over his elders.<sup>1</sup> Ibo youths were organized into age-group associations which not only had disciplinary power over their members but also played important political and judicial roles within the community.<sup>2</sup> In these features, Ibo culture differed markedly from both Yoruba and Hausa cultures, which placed a great value on age and ascribed status.

On the whole, then, when one considers the traditional political culture of the Ibos, the largest ethnic group in Nigeria's Eastern states, one discovers neither a constitutional monarchy nor a theocracy. Instead, one is confronted with a strong republicanism which features a wide dispersal of tribal authority based on patrilineal kinship groups.

Unlike the Hausas or the Yorubas, the Ibos never developed permanent large-scale state systems. Equalitarianism, individualism and achievement were highly placed in their value system, and there was a high degree of popular participation in the process of policy making. It is for these reasons that the political culture of the Ibos is often referred to as "parademocratic" at least, if not "democratic".

With the Yorubas, there existed what one might call a check-and-balance machinery through which political excesses by the Oba were controlled. Patrilineage was the basic element in the Yoruba political

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 191.

<sup>2</sup> Nnamdi Azikiwe, Renascent Africa (Lagos, 1937), p. 24.

system. The lineages headed by the oldest member of the descent groups clustered together to form politically unified towns.

The Yoruba political culture tended to be a mix of certain aspects of the Ibo and Hausa-Fulani political culture. The Yoruba Oba was both secular and sacred. In spite of the fusion of both secular and sacred, the Yoruba Oba was not absolute. Traditionally, he was a constitutional monarch who, more often than not, accepted the policy advice of the senior chiefs. It is therefore not surprising that the Ibo village was traditionally more autonomous than its Yoruba counterpart.

The Fulani Empire, in the Northern states of Nigeria, has as its distinguishing quality the large-scale state form of political organization. Looking at emirate rule from the standpoint of the commoner, Richard Sklar and C. S. Whitaker indicated that "emirate rule was despotic in form" because "the personal security of the commoner depended wholly on the uncertain benevolence of his overlords."<sup>1</sup> Concerning the nature and structure of emirate rule, they continued, "Fief-holders residing at the capital of an emirate were clients of the Emirs; they were in turn patrons of subordinate agents through whom they administered and exploited the subject communities within their jurisdiction. The concentration of 'de jure' power and authority in the hands of the emir tended to inhibit any opposition to him, even from those within the ranks of the ruling stratum".<sup>2</sup> The emirs, unlike the Yoruba Oba, therefore, tended to be

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<sup>1</sup> Richard L. Sklar and C. S. Whitaker, "The Federal Republic of Nigeria" in Gwendolen Carter, ed; National Unity and Regionalism in Eight African States (Ithaca, 1966), p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

despotic. In short, the Hausa-Fulani Empire was a theocratic dynasty, for the emir claimed unquestioned religious sanctions derived through divine delegation. Consequently, one dared not question the authority or the wisdom of God's appointed. Thus, dissimilar political cultures--parademocratic versus monarchical versus theocratic autocratic--were juxtaposed within the state of Nigeria, right from the time of early political activity.

### CHAPTER III

#### PATTERNS OF EARLY POLITICAL ACTIVITY: ANTI-COLONIAL AGITATION BASED IN URBAN CENTERS

On several occasions in the two decades preceding World War I, residents of Lagos vigorously protested actions of the British government in Nigeria. Four of the protests will be examined. The measures that were resented were largely necessary to the government's program of establishing formal British rule over Nigeria at the turn of the century.<sup>1</sup> These early protests were in the nature of "primary resistance" to the British pressures, in that they were particular responses to particular imperial measures deemed oppressive or onerous rather than fundamental challenges to imperial rule or positive affirmations of the objective of Nigerian self-government. But the rancor produced by the official measures, and the political awakening that accompanied demonstrations of

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<sup>1</sup> There were many manifestations of protests and resistance from the very beginning of the expansion of British influence in Nigeria. Some of these are briefly described in Vol. I of P. Amaury Talbot, The Peoples of Southern Nigeria (Oxford, 1962). At the time of economic unification of the Lagos settlements with the Gold Coast (Ghana) in 1883, the African traders and merchants of Lagos and along the Niger and Benue rivers strongly protested. After the Berlin Conference of 1885, these groups intensified their agitation demanding formal separation of Lagos from Gold Coast (Ghana). Partly in response to this pressure, a new charter was granted by the imperial government in January, 1886, making Lagos a separate Colony. See T. Olawale Elias, "Makers of Nigerian Law," West Africa (December 3, 1955): 1135.

popular resentment, helped not only to foment distrust of British intentions, but also to lay the groundwork for a more programmatic form of nationalism.

The first incident occurred in 1895<sup>1</sup> when the governor proposed a house and land tax on the inhabitants of Lagos. In response, about 5,000 Lagos citizens went to Government House to demonstrate their strong opposition, and as a result the tax measure was never enforced.<sup>2</sup> The second wave of protest, occurring in late 1907 and early 1908, was provoked by governmental expropriation of property on Lagos Island under the Land Acquisition Ordinance in order to provide sites for official residences. The resulting popular discontent was expressed in a petition sent to the Secretary of State for the Colonies. According to one report

The natives are openly talking of stopping trade in order to make the Governor feel how much they resent it. Several mass meetings have been held in Lagos, and the crowd went so far as to throw stones at the houses along the front, and in one case pulled a European merchant off his bicycle. . . it is not only the Government officers who are involved, but every white man in the colony. . . . The natives begin to see that it is they who are finding money to build all these fine palaces. . . the people look at their own poor little huts alongside the palatial buildings of the European and wonder how far this thing is to go. . . . They see these Government officers coming out for twelve months at a time, and then go away for six months on full pay, they see a pension list annually being added to; they see jinrickshas and servants, horses and stable boys, addition to the salaries of these officials. . . . The extravagance of the Government is becoming more than the people can stand. It is particularly visible in the luxuries of official Lagos life.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Kalu Ezera, Constitutional Developments in Nigeria (Cambridge, 1960), p. 14.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 21-22, quoting The African Mail, January 31, 1908. The government expropriated a Baptist chapel and dispossessed sixty-five

In January, 1908, a third government measure aroused an even stronger outburst of popular resentment, which found expression on several occasions in the following eight years. The government levied a water rate on the local population in order to pay loan and maintenance expenditures arising from the development of a potable water supply for Lagos.<sup>1</sup>

Also, for the first time, educated Lagosians organized the People's Union for the purpose of defending native rights in general, and of opposing expropriation, changes in land tenure, and the water rate in particular.

Another government action that precipitated no little protest and organizational activity was the Colonial office appointment of the West African Commission in 1912 for the purpose of determining the feasibility of applying the Northern Nigeria system of land tenure to Southern Nigeria. Since under that system all rights over land were "under the control and subject to the disposition of the Governor", leaders of opinion in Lagos regarded the proposal as an imperial move to deprive Africans in Southern Nigeria of the right to own land.

In general, membership in the early political associations in Lagos was limited to a few leaders who sought to defend what they considered the natural rights of Africans, and their acquired rights as British

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African residents. All unofficial members (both European and African) of the Legislative Council protested the appropriation of £10,000 for the purpose of carrying out the expropriation. Ibid., December 6, 1907. The Secretary of State for the Colonies supported the governor's position on the Land Acquisition Ordinance and rejected the petition sent to him. Ibid., February 14, 1908.

<sup>1</sup>Lagos Chiefs and Landowners presented a long petition to Governor Egerton opposing the new water rate.



subjects, against the policies of a colonial government in the first phase of expansion and development. Such associations were primarily instruments for achieving a united front in protesting against particular grievances, and little effort was made to build them into permanent associations. Once the grievance was disposed of, the organization either became moribund or split into hostile factions. Indeed, in 1921, Sir Hugh Clifford complained of the absence of any group from which he could obtain African views.<sup>1</sup> Two years later the editor of the Nigerian Advocate lamented that the "fault in us in Nigeria is that we cannot exercise tolerance with one another, and we quarrel over things that do not count."<sup>2</sup>

In retrospect, it could be argued that one of the reasons for such weakness among Nigerians was the absence of meaningful political roles for them to play, or of an arena of legitimate political activity. They lacked a strong sense of purpose upon which associational development might be built. In this respect, the constitution of 1923 opened a new phase in Nigerian political development, by electing for the first time four members—three for Lagos and one for Calabar to the Legislative Council. The Council was to legislate directly for the Lagos and Southern Provinces. It did not have authority over the Northern Provinces, although the Annual Budget for the whole country had to be passed by the Council.

All Dissatisfaction with the Colonial Governments were  
Channeled into and Expressed in the Political Arena

As the constitution of 1923 opened a new phase in Nigerian political

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<sup>1</sup>Kalu Ezera, Constitutional Development, p. 24; quoting, Nigerian Advocate, August 15, 1923.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

development, so was there a serious dilemma in connection with the status and role of the educated elements. The antagonism of the white community, and especially of officialdom, toward educated Nigerians became more pronounced when it was realized not only that they were the source of political agitation, but also that they aspired to greater participation in the government. It was the educated Nigerians who organized mass meetings in Lagos, provoked vituperative articles in the local press, and made life miserable and insecure for British administrators.

When the new constitution went into effect in 1923, the intense competition for the three elective positions allocated to Lagos stimulated an unprecedented political awakening by educated elements. Two new political parties sprang into being, and within a few years, five new newspapers began publication. The Nigerian National Democratic Party under the leadership of Herbert Macaulay, emerged as the most powerful group; its candidates were victorious in the Legislative Council elections of 1923, 1928, and 1933. Until 1938, this party was the major force in Lagos political life. Although its principal function was to support candidates for the Lagos seats on the Legislative Council, its stated aims asserted a broader responsibility:

To secure the safety or welfare of the people of the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria, as an integral part of the British Imperial Commonwealth and to carry the banner of "Right, Truth, Liberty and Justice" to the empyrean height of Democracy until the realization of its ambitious goal of "A Government of the People, by the People, for the People". . . and, at the same time, to maintain an attitude of unswerving loyalty to the Throne and Person of His Majesty the King Emperor, by being strictly constitutional in the adoption of its method and general procedure.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Constitution of the Nigerian National Democratic Party, (Lagos, n.d.), p. 1; quoted by Kalu Ezera, Constitutional Development, p. 26.

The party included the following specific objectives and demands in its program:

1. In regard to Lagos,
  - (a) the nomination and election of the Lagos members of the Legislative Council (this is the party's main function).
  - (b) the achievement of municipal status and complete local self-government for Lagos.
2. In regard to Nigeria,
  - (a) the establishment of branches and auxiliaries of the party in all areas of Nigeria.
  - (b) the development of higher education and the introduction of compulsory education throughout Nigeria.
  - (c) economic development of the natural resources of Nigeria under controlled private enterprises.
  - (d) free and fair trade in Nigeria and equal treatment for native traders and producers of Nigeria.
  - (e) the Africanization of the civil service.
  - (f) the recognition of the National Congress of British West Africa and the pledge to work hand-in-hand with that body in support of its entire program.<sup>1</sup>

Notwithstanding its claim to be "Nigerian" and "National" the Democratic party remained throughout its long history an exclusively Lagos organization, although abortive efforts were made to establish branches at Abeokuta, Ibadan, and Kano. The failure to nationalize the party was due in part to Herbert Macaulay, who was not only thoroughly preoccupied with

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<sup>1</sup>Kalu Ezera, Constitutional Development, p. 30.

the defense of the House of Docemo (the House of Docemo were the traditional ruler of Lagos and supporters of Herbert Macaulay's NNDP against the colonial government), but also determined to keep the party under his firm control. The establishment of branches outside Lagos could have challenged his leadership.

The Constitution of the party clearly stated that branches in the protectorate would be "subject to the direction and control of Parent Body in Lagos."<sup>1</sup> Secondly, until 1931 Lagos was the only urban area in Nigeria (except for Calabar in the Cross River State which had one representative) where Africans could directly elect a legislative representative. The native administration system, which prevailed throughout the protectorate, did not allow for party activity. In a few urban areas in the Southern Provinces, as well as in second-class towns (for example, Port Harcourt, Aba, Enugu, Kaduna, Kano, Jos, Sokoto, and Benin City), there was a fairly early development of local political organizations, but variations in the systems of government and in the scope allowed local bodies made affiliation with the NNDP pointless, even if there had been a desire for such affiliation. Thus parochialism, the lack of common consciousness, and the desire of Lagos leaders to retain leadership were crucial determinants in confirming Western-style political activity in Lagos. But the system of indirect rule and the limitation of the elective principle to Lagos were equally important. In Calabar, where one member was elected to the Legislative Council, the Calabar Improvement League engaged in some political activity.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> Historical Records of the Calabar Improvement League, Calabar, Nigeria, quoted by E. A. Keay and T. Thomas, West African Government (Ibadan, 1965), p. 113.

Although the Democratic party confined its activities to Lagos, it frequently took a "national" stand on issues; thus it fostered the consciousness, among Lagosians at least, that Lagos was part of a larger territory called Nigeria. In 1930 the party sent a deputation to the governor to discuss such national matters as the trade depression and appointment and deposition of chiefs. At a series of mass meetings held periodically throughout the fifteen years of its dominance (1923-1938), the party occasionally raised issues of an all-Nigerian nature and frequently criticized the government. Moreover, Dr. C. C. Adeniyi-Jones, president of the party and one of its representatives in the Legislative Council from 1926-1938, was the most militantly critical member of the council. He frequently raised provocative and challenging questions which applied to all Nigeria or more frequently, to the African race. The debates of the Legislative Council during his tenure in office provide a good index to the growth of racial and national consciousness.<sup>1</sup>

#### The Turning Point in Nationalistic Activities

Several developments in the latter part of 1937 and in 1938 produced a radically new twist in nationalist thinking and organizational activity in Nigeria. Two militant nationalists with strong personalities returned from abroad with zeal and determination to arouse a more positive nationalism: Nnamdi Azikiwe (Ibo), an American-trained political scientist and journalist; and H. A. Davis (Yoruba), a former student of Harold Laski.

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<sup>1</sup>Legislative Council Debates, Nigeria, June 12, 1934, pp. 42-43; quoted by E. A. Keay and H. Thomas, West African Government, p. 111.

Their arrival, coupled with developments within Nigeria, rejuvenated the Lagos-centered Youth Movement which, in the next three years, became the first Nigeria-wide multitribal nationalist organization in Nigerian history. Events during these three crucial years laid bare certain underlying factors which were destined to shape the subsequent course of the nationalist movement.

During the fifteen-year period 1934-1949, Nnamdi Azikiwe was undoubtedly the most important and celebrated nationalist leader on the West coast of Africa, if not in all tropical Africa. Azikiwe spent his first seven years in America at segregated Negro colleges in the Southern atmosphere of discrimination and caste. Profound changes were occurring in the character of protest activity among American Negroes with the growth of a militant press, the emergence of a "Negro Renaissance" with a new emphasis upon the rediscovery of Africa, the "Black Nationalism" of Garveyism, the Communist Party, race riots, lynchings, and mass demonstrations all reaching high pitch during the four years preceding the Depression. As a poor student, Azikiwe was compelled to work as a dishwasher, a steward, a coal miner, and even as a boxer. Thus he felt the full impact of the discrimination and economic insecurity that befell the average American Negro. As a result of his nine years in the United States, Azikiwe was determined to be a leader, with the West Coast of Africa as his arena, in the world-wide struggle to emancipate the Negro race.

Although Azikiwe's power and influence resulted partly from his fresh and militant approach, they also reflected the fact that he was the first non-Yoruba Nigerian (apart from Ernest Ikoli, an Ijaw) to emerge into prominence. For forty-five years the Ibo had been on the periphery of

Nigerian politics. They were the last of the major groups in Southern Nigeria to be pacified by the British Colonials. Their passion for education and their desire to catch up with other groups were insatiable. It was commonly remarked by Ibos themselves that "an Ibo would accept education from anyone, even from the Devil."<sup>1</sup> During the 1920's and 1930's educational facilities in Iboland expanded at a far greater rate than in any other area of Nigeria. Azikiwe at once became a symbol of Ibo (indeed, of all non-Yoruba) achievement and emancipation, and he was able to mobilize the political support of Ibos, who by then were scattered all over urban centers in Nigeria. The nationalistic theme in his nationalism has been the Unity of Nigeria: "We can never split--no, never. We are not a party, we are a national government whose mission is the regeneration of our fatherland."<sup>2</sup>

Stimulated by these new, provocative influences, the Nigerian Youth Movement assumed a more active political and national role. It contested and won Lagos Town Council elections, then it turned to challenge the fifteen-year domination of Macaulay and his National Democratic Party over Lagos politics and representation on the Legislative Council. Until 1938, nomination and election to the three Lagos seats in the Legislative Council had usually been settled within the confines of Herbert Macaulay's home. In the October, 1938 elections, however, the Youth Movement, which had in the meantime established its own journal the "Daily Service", launched a vigorous

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<sup>1</sup>James S. Coleman, Nigeria: Background to Nationalism (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966), p. 224.

<sup>2</sup>Daily Service, October 5, 1938, quoted by O. Arikpo, The Development of Modern Nigeria (London, 1967), p. 11.

campaign and defeated Macaulay's party. This meant a radical change in traditional leadership. One of the main points in the platform of the Youth Movement was that Nigerians should assume the leadership of the country, referring, no doubt, to the fact that many Democratic party leaders had been native foreigners,<sup>1</sup> that is, non-Nigerian Africans who were living in Lagos and became Nigerian citizens by adoption. Thus, this was the first major step in the Nigerianization of the nationalist movement. In February 1941, the Nigerian Youth Movement met a devastating blow from which it never really recovered. The Akinsanya crisis was the first major manifestation of tribal tension that affected all subsequent efforts to achieve unity.

The immediate cause of the Akinsanya crisis in the Nigerian Youth Movement was disagreement over the selection of a candidate for a seat in the Legislative Council vacated by Dr. K. A. Abayomi, outgoing president of the NYM. Ernest Ikoli, an Ijaw, who was editor of the Lagos Daily Service, the party's official organ--and recently elected president of the party, and Samuel Akinsanya, an Ijebu Yoruba and vice-president of the party, offered themselves as candidates. Both Ikoli and Akinsanya had been founders of the party, and both were members of the elite group in Lagos, but the former was selected over the latter. Akinsanya, the West African Pilot, Azikiwe, and some Ibos and Ijebus interpreted this action as a manifestation of tribal discrimination, because normally other Yorubas tended to show prejudice against Ijebus. As a consequence, Azikiwe resigned, and a number of Ibos and Ijebus went with him, and the NYM practically disintegrated despite the effort of many leaders to revive it. The movement had, however, created a

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 15.



force in the form of the young people, many of whom among the Ijebu and the Ibo flocked to Azikiwe's standard.

The lull in party activity which followed the Ikoli-Akinsaya affair did not last long, for in 1942 the Nigeria Reconstruction Group was founded by Azikiwe and other leaders, notably M. E. R. Okorodudu, E. E. Esua and L. A. Onojobi. Its membership was limited to intellectuals, and its objective was to engage in social research in all sorts. The group tried to found a national front in collaboration with the NYM, whose function would be to inculcate in the minds of Nigerians the idea of oneness and the consciousness of kind.<sup>1</sup>

The early years of World War II therefore marked the beginning of a new era in which the nationalist movement was destined to be of an entirely different order from that of the preceding two generations. It was a period of transition from a tired and parochial older set, to a younger group of intellectuals whose ambitions and aspirations were far more intense, positive, and urgent. The Youth Movement had tried but failed to embrace both elements: the old who were weary and discredited, and the young who were zealous, impatient, and leaderless. The profound social and economic changes during World War II brought forth new leadership, mobilized new forces, and created a radically different climate of opinion and a setting more congenial to the development of a positive nationalism with the formation of many national parties due to changes in the constitution.

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<sup>1</sup>Nnamdi Azikiwe, The Development of Political Parties in Nigeria (London, 1957), p. 41.

## CHAPTER IV

### ETHNICITY AND POLITICS

#### Introduction and Institutionalization of Ethnic Sectionalism as the Basis for Political Organization and Activity

The geographical entity called "Nigeria" today is indeed a British imperial creation. Chief Obafemi Awolowo noted in his lecture at Saint Pancras Town Hall in London in 1960:

- (1) that Nigeria is a British creation
- (2) that Nigeria consists of a multiplicity of races who are as different from one another as the races of Europe.
- (3) that for about forty-three years previous, the British had striven to unite all these diverse people . . . and to infuse in them a sense of common nationality.<sup>1</sup>

The existence of Nigeria was not made possible until just about half a century ago, when Sir Frederick (later Lord) Lugard conquered the Moslem emirates of what is today northern Nigeria.

A brief review of the main stages in the development of British administration may be helpful to an understanding of the problem of Nigeria's constitutional development and the internal political forces that have influenced them.

Modern Nigeria did not spring into being as a complete whole both

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<sup>1</sup> Donald S. Rothchild, Toward Unity in Africa: A Study of Federation in British Africa (Washington, 1960), p. 142.

politically and administratively. Even the name "Nigeria" was first officially recognized in a House of Commons debate on the Royal Niger Company in July, 1899, but there was no such official entity as "Nigeria" until 1900, neither did Nigeria have a common ruler before this date, as separate territories continued in practice.

The speech of Governor Sir Hugh Clifford before the so-called Nigeria council on December 29, 1920, illustrates:

. . . the suggestion that there is, or can be in the visible future, such a thing as a "West African Nation" is as manifest an absurdity as that there is, or can be, an "European Nation" at all events until the arrival of the Millennium.... The peoples of West Africa do not belong to the same stock and are not of common descent; . . . (they have) no common language . . . and no community of religious beliefs. . . . As a matter of fact, the Hausa of Zaria, the Bantu tribesmen of the valley of the Benue, and say the Fantis of Gold Coast are less nearly allied to one another than are, for example, the Scandinavians of the Baltic, the Slavs of Bulgaria and the Semitic peoples of Egypt and Morocco . . . Any advancement or recognition of these ridiculous claims and pretensions. . . is mischievous, because they are incompatible with that natural development of real national self-government which all true patriots in Nigeria. . . should continue to secure and maintain. . . . It is the consistent policy of the government of Nigeria to maintain and support the local tribal institutions and the indigenous forms of Government . . . which are to be regarded as the natural expression of (African) political genius. . . . I am entirely convinced of the separate institutions . . . to maintain that each one of them is, in a very real sense, a nation. . . . It is the task of the Government of Nigeria to build up and fortify these national institutions.<sup>1</sup>

But Sir Hugh did not stop there; he continued:

Assuming . . . that the impossible were feasible that this collection of self-contained and mutually independent Native states, separated from one another, as many of them are, by great distance, by differences of history and traditions,

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<sup>1</sup> James S. Coleman, Nigeria: Background to Nationalism, p. 194.

and by ethnological, racial, tribal, political, social and religious barriers, were indeed capable of being welded into a single homogenous nation--a deadly blow would thereby be struck at the very root of national self-government in Nigeria, which secures to each separate people the right to maintain its identity, its individuality and its nationality, its own chosen form of government; and the peculiar political and social institutions which have been evolved for it by the wisdom and by the accumulated experience of generations of its forebears.<sup>1</sup>

According to the above statements by Sir Hugh as the representative of the British Government, it means Nigeria began as a collection of contiguous British possessions and became independent as a loose federation on the Australian model. After World War I, British administrators tried to unify Nigeria's three principal areas into administrative regions. Lugard's proposal of amalgamation, largely followed by the government established in 1914, gave the Governor-General final authority over the whole country. An obvious result of the federal colonial structure was a failure to prepare Nigeria for independence because the survival of ethnic groups was encouraged, a development that hindered the growth of a feeling of being "Nigerian" with common problems. The indirect rule of Lord Lugard did not promote much to the forging of a Nigerian nation, as Coleman wrote:

Whatever else might be said of the application of indirect rule in Nigeria--and a very strong case can be made for it --there can be little doubt that it has complicated the task of welding diverse elements into a Nigerian nation.<sup>2</sup>

By 1922, the Legislative Council of Nigeria was established but the Northern Region was excluded from the area of legislative competence of

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

the council. As a result of that there was no central institution between 1922 to 1947, as there was no history of Nigerian unity during this crucial period, Again Coleman stated:

In short, before 1947 there was little opportunity for a Nigerian to feel that he was under a common government which commanded his obedience, allegiance and loyalty. The situation was further aggravated by the educational system which aimed at cultivating a "love of tribe", as well as by the system of native administration. . . .<sup>1</sup>

Starting from 1900, the territorial separateness and individuality of the component units of the country were encouraged by the British Government. Each of the separate colonial territories--the colony of Lagos, and the protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria--was independently administered and directly responsible to the colonial office in Britain. Despite the unification of 1914, Lagos, which was later to become the capital of Nigeria, was not divested of its unique status as a colony but in fact retained that character until 1951. Right from the inception of Nigeria, the Northerners, encouraged by the British policy of separate development, wanted their own distinct and separate development, in which they would have nothing to do with the south.

Another important factor which resulted ultimately in Nigeria's disunity was the British colonial policy in the field of education and missionary evangelization as Table 4 illustrates. This policy led to differences in the timing and intensity of Western education in different parts of Nigeria, and therefore to a differential impact. The very wide gap in education and social thinking between the North and the South came to militate against national unity.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

TABLE 4

## DIFFERENTIAL EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN NIGERIA

Year	Southern Nigeria Eastern and Western Regions				Northern Nigeria			
	Schools		Students in Attendance		Schools		Students in Attendance*	
	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary
1906	126	1	11,872	20	1	0	a	0
1912	150	10	35,716	76	34	0	954	0
1926	3,828	18	138,249	518	125	0	5,210	0
1937	3,533	26	218,610	4,285	539	1	20,269	65
1947	4,984	43	538,391	9,657	1,110	3	70,962	251
1957	13,473 <sup>b</sup>	176	2,343,317 <sup>b</sup>	28,208	2,080	18	185,484 <sup>c</sup>	3,643

\*Attendance

<sup>a</sup>Number unknown

<sup>b</sup>Figures include 30,602 students attending 94 secondary modern schools where post-primary instruction is given for three additional years for students who either are academically not up to the standards in full secondary schools or who cannot afford the higher fees.

<sup>c</sup>Figure for 1956

Source: Annual Report, Colony of Southern Nigeria, 1906, pp. 199ff; Annual Reports, Northern Nigeria, 1900-1911; African Education (Oxford: Nuffield Foundation, 1953), pp. 47-48. Quoted by E. A. Keay and H. Thomas, West African Government (Ibadan, 1965), p. 215.

Furthermore, the internal boundaries and regional division of Nigeria helped to complicate matters and make the achievement of unity impossible.

Because of the evil of tribalism and sectionalism, whichever region had control of the center through its dominant political party would at once be in a position to determine the economic, if not the political fate of all the other regions. As a result of this state of affairs, the struggle for power at the center became intense, and tribalism was fully exploited by Nigeria's politicians in the hope of achieving leadership and the dominating position at the center. It is for this reason that the census conducted in Nigeria between 1962 and 1964, and the one conducted by the Nigerian Military Government in 1974 turned out a huge failure (See Table 5 for 1952 to 1963 population census).

Administratively, the division of Nigeria into three regions dates back to 1939. The Richards Constitution reaffirmed this division in 1946, by setting up Regional Assemblies to channel demands to a federal Legislative Council in Lagos. The Northern Region was for the first time represented in the Legislative Council. The Richards Constitution made no significant change in the composition of the Executive Council. It was simply intended to provide a link between Native Authorities and Government, recognizing Regional diversity.

It was intended that the Richards Constitution should last for nine years, but the demand for a responsible non-official executive was becoming more and more vocal. One of the criticisms of the Richards Constitution had been the lack of prior consultation with Nigerians. In 1948, the new Governor, Sir John MacPherson, initiated action on a new Constitution

which, when it finally became law in 1951, had been preceded by three years of careful consultation at all levels.

TABLE 5  
POPULATION CENSUS FIGURES  
(in millions)

Region	1952-1953 Census	1962 Census	1962 (Revised)	1963 (Revised)
Northern Region	16.8	22.5	31.0	29.8
Eastern Region	7.2	12.4	12.3	12.4
Western Region	4.6	7.8	7.8	10.3
Midwestern Region	1.5	2.2	2.2	2.5
Lagos Territory	0.3	0.7	0.7	0.7
Nigeria (Total)	30.4	45.6	54.0	55.7

Source: Walter Schwarz, Nigeria (New York, 1968), p. 163.

The first great change introduced by the MacPherson Constitution was the creation of Regional Legislatures in the full sense. In addition, direct election to the central legislature was ended: The regional legislatures would provide the federal delegates. Ending direct popular election to the central legislature emphasized the regional context of Nigeria's political awakening. At the same time, this regional focus deepened because of the decentralization of the new constitutional provisions. The most significant political result of the 1951 MacPherson Constitution was the attention each of the new political parties subsequently gave to its own region. It is crucial to note at this point that as the constitutional development of Nigeria came under the influence of Nigerian politicians



and came to reflect their views, divisive trends began to dominate, and British administration provided the major unifying influence.

With the approach of independence and the consequent intensification of regional hostilities, the politics of tribalism or regionalism (National Council of Nigerian Citizens--NCNC, Eastern Region; Action Group--AG, Western Region; and Northern Peoples' Congress--NPC, Northern Region) took on a new dimension. The Yoruba and Ibo politicians realized that neither of them could control national political power without securing a significant political foothold in the Northern region. The NCNC formed alliance with the Northern Elements Progressive Union--NEPU, and the Action Group with the United Middle Belt Congress--UMBC, in order to challenge the ruling NPC in the region. Thus, both Southern parties--the NCNC and AG--had sufficient support in regions other than their own to present themselves as truly national in character.

What then, have been the major effects of the colonial period on the Nigerian peoples? In the absence of any major commitment to weld a Nigerian identity, differences between the major Nigerian ethnic groups have not decreased. If anything, as the sociologist P. C. Lloyd has indicated, the opposite trend has occurred:

In doing so little to break down traditional patterns of residence and allegiance, economic development has not contributed to any reduction in inter-ethnic differences. In fact, it may be notoriously uneven, and these new inequalities are superimposed on all existing rivalries.<sup>1</sup>

In sum, colonial rule failed to mold Nigerians into one political or constitutional system. Therefore, there was no basis for a dominant set

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<sup>1</sup> P. C. Lloyd, The Ethnic Background to the Nigerian Crisis (London, 1968), pp. 2-4.

of political attitudes and ethics created. What the MacPherson constitution did was to give the three main cultural groupings in each of the three regions, not only the opportunity to demonstrate their incompatibilities and mutual distrust but also the opportunity to view the position of things to come in terms of ethnic competition for power in the first Republic.

## CHAPTER V

### COMPETITION, CONFLICT AND CIVIL WAR

#### 1. Competition for Dominance Just Before Independence

In Nigeria, the political parties assumed an ethnic complexion well before independence. The split between the Nigerian Youth Movement and the N.C.N.C. of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe in the early 1940's to some extent followed ethnic divisions between Yoruba and Ibo--the two southern main groups. The Action Group developed from the political wing of the cultural association of the Yoruba educated elite, the Egbe Omo Oduduwa; the N.C.N.C. was closely allied with the Ibo State Union. The N.P.C. was founded by the Fulani aristocracy. In the smaller ethnic groups, a local political party was often indistinguishable from the cultural associations.

A second factor producing ethnic hostility is the interpersonal competition for offices in the modern sector of the economy.

A third factor which engenders hostility is the image of the modern society to be created in Nigeria. In southern Nigeria the educated elite have come largely from humble homes. The traditional elite of Obas, chiefs, and lesser title-holders today have insignificant roles at the national level; their remaining prestige is confined to their own communities. The educated elite are thus free to construct a modern society unencumbered by that of their past.

In Northern Nigeria, however, the Fulani aristocracy, through the

NPC, retain their elite status. Their problems have been to modernize their society only so far as leaves their superior position unimpaired. This they have substantially achieved through their control of the political party, the Native Authorities, and the Alkali courts. The introduction of institutions from the south elected local government councils, centrally controlled and politically independent courts--threatens their status.

Of the factors cited here, the first--the struggle for power, is inevitable in a new African state, though it is not inevitable that the struggle should be between ethnic groups--in Nigeria it is merely that it should be so. The interpersonal competition for offices is a feature of Southern Nigeria, which is less apparent in the North or in those African states which have not yet begun to produce too many educated people. The third factor is somewhat peculiar to Nigeria. (In a different context Liberia has its traditional elite, still in power and circumspect in its modernizing policies). To the extent that ethnic hostility is rife, it may be, and frequently is, increased by politicians who use ethnic issues to enhance their electoral support. Ethnic arguments will be used when policy differences between the rival parties are minimal or where the policies of a party are unlikely to win popular support. Thus, at the grass-roots level, AG politicians often asserted that an NCNC victory in Western Nigeria would mean that Yorubaland would be ruled by the Ibo. Overtly ethnic propaganda reached its height in Akintola's attempts to win popular support before the Regional election of 1965, thereby leading and plunging the country into civil war. For more details on this, see the section on the emergency in Western Nigeria below.

## 2. Conflict After Independence

(a) Tribalism: Nigeria became an independent sovereign state on October 1, 1960. On that date, in a solemn and colorful ceremony, Princess Alexandra of Kent, on behalf of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain, handed over to the late Nigerian Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the constitutional instrument of Nigeria's independence. By this act, Nigeria became the sixteenth African state to achieve nationhood in 1960. The various nationalist fronts in the country had joined hands to ensure the ending of colonial rule. Having succeeded in doing so on October 1, 1960, it was assumed that the enthusiasm with which the country was launched into nationhood would sustain the Nigerian Federation and help her people to develop a sense of common destiny and common nationality. The nationalists who had engaged directly and actively in the independence struggle had always insisted that independence would make a lot of difference. They expected the emergence of a new social order in which the tension and oppression resulting from colonial rule would cease, and in which their leaders, acting without the restraints and limitations of the colonial days, would usher in an era of prosperity and progress in all fields.

But events after this date were soon to prove that Nigeria's most vexing, most basic problems were those of tribalism, sectionalism--or sub-nationalism, and of leadership. Because there were no honorable and acceptable answers to these problems, Nigeria, during the period between 1962 and 1966, was to be launched into a series of stormy crises which brought the country to the brink of disintegration and ultimately led to the take-over of the government by the Army on January 15, 1966. As a

result of these crises the hope of Nigerians for leadership in African politics and for maximization of progress was frustrated. Indeed, Nigeria became the laughing-stock of the watching world.

(b) Emergency in Western Nigeria: After the British had left, the major motivation for unity, that is, the nationalist struggle against colonial rule, was gone. Nigerians now turned their attention inwards, to domestic problems. Ethnic, regional or other particular interests, which had temporarily held back their claims, started to reassert themselves. Gradually the sense of restraint disappeared among the country's leaders, and the prospect of continued peace in Nigeria became very gloomy. As a result, there was crisis in Western Nigeria within the Action Group party.

There developed a conflict between Chief Awolowo and Chief Akintola, the deputy leader of the party. The former had surrendered the Premiership of the Western Region of Nigeria to Chief Akintola in the hope of becoming Prime Minister of the Federation after the Federal elections of 1959. The failure of his party to win the elections meant that Awolowo, though leader of the AG, was heading the opposition in Lagos while Akintola, who was only deputy leader, was governing the West. Awolowo felt that, as party leader, he should exercise general supervision and insisted that changes of policy and major appointments in the West should not be made until after he had been consulted. Another source of conflict was Chief Akintola's wish to strengthen national unity and join the Federal Prime Minister's coalition. Chief Awolowo was on bad terms with Sir Abubakar and would never agree to join a coalition.

The final crisis came in 1964, when the Governor of the region received a petition, purporting to be signed by a majority of the members

of the House of Assembly and demanding Akintola's removal from the Premiership. The Governor, acting within what were at the time his constitutional powers, removed Akintola. Meanwhile, when Chief Adegbenro, the successor for Akintola designated by Awolowo, attempted to convene his new government, the minority of members who were against Awolowo's scheme disrupted the Western Legislature so much that the Prime Minister declared a state of public emergency in the West. The Federal Government, using its emergency powers, placed the Region under an Administrator, who constituted the sole authority until the emergency was lifted on December 31, 1964, followed by elections as we shall see later.

(c) The Census Crisis: In 1962 Nigeria had her first population census since independence. The fact that it turned out to be a big fiasco shows how hard it is to establish the simplest facts when the result may have major political consequences. Nigeria had last been counted between 1952 and 1953, but that was under the British. According to the results, the Northern Region had a population of about 17 million, the Eastern Region 7 million, the Western and Midwestern Regions 6 million, while the Federal Territory of Lagos had 0.3 million. The total population of Nigeria, therefore was given as 30 million.<sup>1</sup> (See Table 5). The political significance of the 1952/53 census was that it assured the dominance of the North in the Federal Government since seats in the Federal House of Parliament were then allocated on a population basis. Out of the 312

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<sup>1</sup> 1952/53 census was not accurate because many Nigerians avoided being counted out of the belief that the census was required in order to increase taxation. Source: Federal Census Office, Lagos, Nigeria, 1963.

seats, the North received 174 seats, thus placing it in an absolute majority. Since in Nigeria the major political parties were based on regions, a population census that gave the North such a majority meant handing over the Federal Government in perpetuity to the NPC.

In 1962, the national census brought on another crisis. The NPC had ordered a recount of the census undertaken, because the result was adverse to the North.<sup>1</sup> The recount was carried out, but the result was rejected by the Eastern Region because it was adverse to it. The weight of the cultural dissimilarities was being felt increasingly throughout the country. The regional political elites were communicating their displeasure to their Federal representatives. The Ibo pariah groups in the North were especially vulnerable to the mounting antagonism. The difference in political-cultural orientation was a constant additive to the abrasive relationship.

(d) The 1964 Federal Election Crisis: Obviously, Southern Nigerians were determined to wrest power from the Hausa-Fulani by manipulating the results of 1962 census. The federal government forestalled this by condemning the 1962 census and revising the figures. The subsequent Southern outcry led to a completely new census in late 1963. The results published in February 1964, showing a majority retained by the Northerners were rejected by the leader of the NCNC in the Eastern Region.

These political wars led to a rearrangement of Nigeria's political coalitions. In 1964, the main contestants gathered for what was to be the

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<sup>1</sup>James O'Connell in Arthur Hazlewood, ed., African Integration and Disintegration (London, 1967), p. 20.



last major event of Nigeria's short period of democratic experiment. New political party alignments were creating the very situation most feared by Northern leaders. Up to that time, the Ibo-dominated NCNC had served as junior partners in the federal coalition, whose main victims had been Chief Awolowo (imprisoned in 1962 for ten years for treason), and his Yoruba followers. Now the census fiasco convinced the NCNC leader, Dr. Okpara, that alliance with the Hausa-Fulani was untenable. Angered by Akintola's support of the revised 1964 census results (an issue which should have united all Southerners), Okpara influenced the NCNC participants in Akintola's Western Region government to leave the regional coalition. Okpara's NCNC then formed the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) consisting of NCNC; the ruling party in Eastern and Midwestern Nigeria; the Action Group in the West; the NEPU, the main opposition party in Northern Nigeria; and the UMBC led by Mr. J. S. Tarka from the Tiv Division of Northern Nigeria. The sole basis of this alliance was to win the federal elections of 1964.

On the other hand the second alliance was formed comprising the following parties: The NPC, the ruling party in the Northern Region; the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), the ruling party in the Western Region; the Midwest Democratic Front, the opposition party in the Midwestern Region; the Niger Delta Congress; the Dynamic Party, an Eastern Nigerian party; and the Lagos State United Front. It was called the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA).

Elections which occasioned these plans and alliances were to be held on the federal level in December 1964 and in Western Region a year later. At first, UPGA anticipated victory, if electoral malpractice

could be kept down. However, victory in all three Southern regions (East, West, and Mid-West), was requisite for ousting the Northerners from control of the Federal Government. But after observing several real and imagined abuses, UPGA ordered a boycott of the elections, because the regional governments were responsible for electoral machinery in their regions. The UPGA boycott was successfully carried out in most of their constituencies. In March 1965, the federal government held elections in those regions in spite of the boycott, but the UPGA leaders had successfully undercut any emotional support which might have been awarded the victors. Both the Yoruba and Ibo grew progressively more sullen during these events. But the outcome of the 1964 elections was the formation of a broad based government comprising all parties, with Northerners still in control.

(e) The 1965 Western Election Crisis: The undermining of public confidence in the motives of the federal government was completed by the regional election which followed in the West in 1965. An NNDP victory, owing heavily to the ability of the despised Akintola government to manipulate electoral machinery, combined with falling cocoa prices to produce virtual chaos there by the year's end. Many lives and much property were lost in riots, and by December 1965 Nigeria was on the brink of collapse. Then on January 15, 1966 came the first coup, followed by the second one on July 29, 1966, and the third on July 29, 1975.

### 3. The Civil War (July 1967--January 1970)

The irony of the Nigerian civil war is that it was occasioned by the breakdown in the relations between the Ibos and the Hausas, the majority groups that governed Nigeria at the federal center from about 1954 to 1966 --the whole span of the prewar political history in which Nigerians were

more or less in control of power. The antagonism of the Yoruba-AG against the Hausa-NPC, and the bold attempt by the Yoruba-AG to win over all the minority and marginal groups in Nigeria in the federal elections marked out the Yoruba-AG as a "dangerous" political party.

Thus the incidents leading to the 1966 coup and counter-coup, and the civil war that followed was a result of a power struggle between the three majority groups in the country. The first coup took place on January 15, 1966. On the evening of the second day, General Ironsi, the Commander of the Armed Forces took control of the Federal Government and established his authority throughout the country. It was a blow which ended the civilian regime but not the political difficulties besetting Nigeria. All the previous tensions persisted, despite the profession of good intentions on the part of the military leaders. In the end all negotiations failed among the military leaders, and Nigeria disintegrated.

The coup of January 15, 1966 is, therefore, not merely the advent of military rule in Nigeria, it is also the beginning of a crisis far more acute, far less amenable to peaceful resolution than any previous crisis in Nigerian political history. The coup heralded a period of centralization under General Ironsi. This initial trend was sharply reversed by another coup on July 29, 1966 when Ironsi (an Ibo) was killed and General Gowon (a Northerner) became the head of state. During his regime, the country moved into a period of decentralization and dislocation. This second coup jolted the beliefs of many Nigerians in the future of their country as one nation. The massacre of thousands of Easterners, especially Ibos resident in the North, Lagos and West, and the division of Nigeria into twelve states on May 27, 1967 by General Gowon, had increased not

only bitterness but many other problems as well between the Federal Government and Eastern Region.

Thus, the events in the North and East rendered constitutional talks impossible, faced with the mammoth task of caring for the flood of refugees who streamed into the East from all parts of Nigeria. Friction developed from time to time between the Federal Government and the Eastern Region. The military Governor of the region, Lt. Colonel Ojukwu ordered all non-Easterners to leave his region for their own safety, and refused to attend meetings in Lagos.

The situation was worsened by the fact that Ojukwu saw no reason to recognize Gowon's authority. In retaliation against Ojukwu's appropriation of revenues, a postal blockade was declared against the East. The East increasingly felt itself to be a beleaguered state, and clamor for secession grew louder. On May 30, 1967 the former Eastern Region of Nigeria declared itself as an independent Republic of Biafra. The Federal Government at once declared war against the secessionist region from July 6, 1967 til January 12, 1970.

Whatever the outcome of the civil war, Nigeria has been born as a nation. The baptism of fire which many of its citizens have endured has strengthened their resolve to keep their nation strong and viable.

Although there was consensus on the division of Nigeria into twelve states, yet there was strong demand for more states after the civil war. With the overthrow of General Gowon in a bloodless coup on July 29, 1975 Nigeria was further divided into nineteen states by General Muhammed (Hausa). By February 13, 1976 Muhammed was killed in an abortive coup and his leadership was taken over by General Olusegun Obasanjo (Yoruba).

The creation of nineteen states in Nigeria has strengthened the Nigerian nation in three ways. First, it will reduce the number of people who feel neglected by the state capitals. Large populations will not feel left out. Second, since the states are now smaller, the Federal Government becomes more powerful. Third, the creation of states necessitate a new constitution which the first Republic avoided.

## CHAPTER VI

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

#### National Integration and Political Stability

So far we have been concerned with tribal division in Nigeria and we shall now turn to considering the question of national integration and political stability.

The political structure of Nigeria changed on May 27, 1967 and again on February 3, 1976. There are now 19 states in the Federal set up: ten in the North, and 9 in the South. For the minority Nigerians, the exercise was a dream come true. But to the majority Nigerians (Ibo, Hausa and Yoruba), the late General Murtala Muhammed's decision for creation of states certainly crushed their ambitions of controlling Regional and Federal Governments forever.

National integration has eluded Nigerians before and after independence. This had to do with imbalance in political representation and minority problems. First, it was the North fearing political domination by the South, and then the South fearing the North. However, the July 29, 1975 coup in which the late General Muhammed became head of state may not have had similar political motivations as the first two coups of 1966, because most of the coup leaders came from the North.

On the other hand, the abortive coup of February 13, 1976 in which Muhammed died was apparently planned and executed by people from a particular tribe in the Northern section of Nigeria (Tiv).

With the creation of 19 states,<sup>1</sup> Nigeria must now be studied in a new light. Former provincial or divisional headquarters have suddenly become state capitals and before the end of the current development plan, more villages will have good roads, light and pipe-borne water, hospitals, schools and other rural development projects, in order to provide basic social amenities.

The Federal Government should now see the need to concern itself with what the state governments have done in their rural areas. Any imbalance in distributing government-sponsored projects could then be spotted if there is a national chart of all development areas. If the rural areas are developed, local businessmen may be attracted to invest there, thus creating job opportunities for those who might otherwise think that all is only well in urban centers.

In part, the political dialogue of the 1970's seems to substantiate the country's hope for national parties. Though the ethnic underpinnings of political factionalism are still important, ideological consciousness and diversity are definitely emerging among Nigerian politicians, who will be the core of any future party system.

### Conclusion

We have seen how urbanization and the migration of peoples have led to the awakening of political thoughts and consciousness and the development of nationalism in Nigeria.

It has been the intellectual elite of the cities who have been the leaders of the nationalistic movements and the leaders of the political

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<sup>1</sup>Nigeria Year Book, Lagos, Time Press, 1970, p. 21.

parties. It seems very likely that the relatively large numbers of Ibos who have played a prominent role in the nationalist movement in Nigeria is the result of the rapid urbanization of the Ibo peoples in the Eastern Region and the large proportion of Ibos in the population of non-Ibo cities.<sup>1</sup>

With the growth of urban centers, and the establishment of British administration over Nigeria, Western economic forces have profoundly changed both the structure of traditional Nigerian societies and the perspective of Nigerian peoples. The tempo and character of changes created situations and attitudes that have predisposed many Nigerians to radical consciousness and nationalist activity. However, the formation of parties was based on regional divisions.

The period after 1950 which witnessed the entrenchment of ethnic politics in Nigeria was, therefore, the most uninspiring in the history of the nationalist movement in the country. And were it not for the fact that there had already been a substantial movement towards freedom and that the complexities of international politics forced Britain to push forward with the policy of decolonization, it is doubtful whether Nigeria could have achieved her independence in 1960.

The federal arrangement under which Nigeria gained independence was conceived as a means of satisfying the desires of the country's three major ethnic groups to control their destinies while remaining part of a larger political unit. The political crisis during the life of the First Republic reflected the failure of the constitutional arrangements to

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<sup>1</sup> See Table 3 "Degree of Ibo Urbanization Outside Iboland."



distribute political power in an acceptable manner. At the national level the Northern Region was able to dominate at the expense of the Eastern and Western Regions, while within the regions the minority ethnic groups complained bitterly about the predominance of the larger ethnic communities. If the current division of Nigeria into twelve states in 1967, and again into nineteen states in 1975 had come earlier, it probably would have reduced political instability and forestalled the secessionist war.

Unfortunately, the inability to transcend ethnic loyalties in politics has continued in the post-independence period. This factor, combined with corruption, selfishness, lack of idealism and the absence of a sound, dynamic and disciplined leadership was responsible for plunging the country into civil war, 1967/70.

Finally, having outlined the scale of ethnic differences in Nigeria, the writer feels obliged to offer some means of reducing the tensions. The structure of nineteen states has been lauded as a major step toward ensuring healthy ethnic relations, national integration, and national stability in Nigeria. But agitation for state creation in Nigeria has been intrinsically interwoven with the question of ethnic identity and fear and suspicion by the ethnic minorities of the major ethnic groups. As rightly remarked by Arikpo, "The minority problem, more than any other single political issue, was at the root of most of the friction between and within political parties, governments and administration since independence."<sup>1</sup> Yet it is open to question whether any sound federation in

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<sup>1</sup>Okoi Arikpo, The Development of Modern Nigeria (Baltimore, 1967), p. 82.

Nigeria can be based solely on ethnic units or sub-divisions. Other factors, such as compactness of geographical area, administrative convenience, the fact of history, the wishes of the people, political realities, and the viability of the units, need be considered. Ethnicity should be one of the factors, but undue emphasis on it can contribute to considerable systemic stress. Dual loyalty is an aspect of federalism, but in a young federation like Nigeria the danger of ethnic loyalty prevailing over national loyalty is very real. And its results, as the civil war demonstrated, can be disastrous.

Another critical factor in shaping ethnic relations in Nigeria has been the formula for revenue allocation among the various units of the federation. The distribution of funds collected by the central government has always been a source of controversy among the units of the federation, and no allocation formula has ever been universally acceptable. Revenue allocation in Nigeria has revolved around the four basic principles of need, derivation, independent revenue and national interest. However, for a revenue allocation formula to be realistic, it must be consistent with the character of the federation.

The recent experience of a civil war has convinced most Nigerians of the need for unity among the new states. To achieve these twin objectives, sufficient resources must be left to the center to give it strength, and the manner of dividing the remaining resources among the states must be equitable.

## APPENDIX

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS<sup>1</sup>

Tribe: Those people who have a common name for their language and feel themselves to be speaking the same language can be conveniently termed tribe, irrespective of political circumstances. It is the largest social group defined primarily in terms of kinship, and is normally the aggregation of clans.

Sub-tribe: Sub-divisions of the tribe may be termed sub-tribe if the difference in dialectal or geographical if it is in local groups.

Nation: A large group of people who feel that they form a single and exclusive community destined to be an independent state.

Nationalism: An act of political consciousness or state of mind primarily concerned with achieving the independence of the country from foreign rule.

Community: A human group of any size whose members have a consciousness of living a common life and sharing a common destiny.

Nationalist movement: An association organized to achieve self-government for the people whom its members claim to represent.

State: A territorial system having a single and self-sufficient legal order to maintain it.

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<sup>1</sup>Kalu Ezera, Constitutional Development in Nigeria (Cambridge, 1960), p. XIV.

Political Party: An association that competes with other similar associations in periodic elections in order to participate in formal government institutions and thereby influence and control the personnel and policy of government.

Society: A human aggregation whose members have become inter-independent through the exchange of goods and services, a division of labor and a network of relationships and interactions which distinguishes them as a group from other groups.

Clan: A group consisting of one or more extended families descended from one historical ancestor speaking the same language and dialect and observing one common shrine.

Association: A group of people united and organized for the purpose of pursuing a common interest, e.g., Political party, Tribal union and Clan meeting.

Nigerian: An African irrespective of tribe or nationality, who is an indigene of Nigeria.

African: A loose term used mainly by Europeans in referring to members of the Negro race, except those from the United States, who are called "American Negroes" or those from the West Indies, who are called "West Indians."

European: A common term used by Africans to refer to any white person irrespective of nationality.

Race: It refers to a division of mankind distinguished by color of skin, stature, head and general physiognomy, e.g., Black race or white race.

Abbreviations

- A.G.        -- Action Group
- N.P.C.     -- Northern Peoples Congress
- N.C.N.C. -- National Council of Nigerian Citizens.<sup>1</sup>
- U.M.B.C. -- United Middle Belt Congress
- N.E.P.U. -- Northern Elements' Progressive Union
- N.N.D.P. -- Nigerian National Democratic Party
- U.P.G.A. -- United Progressive Grand Alliance
- N.N.A.    -- Nigerian National Alliance

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<sup>1</sup> The NCNC was formerly called "The National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons, but when the Cameroons in 1961 ceased to be part of Nigeria the party became known as the "National Council of Nigerian Citizens, thus retaining the same initials.

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